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*Talking Points for Ambassador Christopher Dell, US Embassy
Informative Meeting on FSC Kosovo Forest Certification Standard,
January 28, 2010, starting at 10:30*

Minister Vehapi, members of the Standards Development Group, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today, to highlight two important factors underlying forest certification: economic growth and the rule of law.

We are taking an important step today towards the international certification of Kosovo's forest management practices. With the achievement of this certification, Kosovo could export its high value timber and wood products to the EU and the US. Accessing these markets would drive growth in investment and employment in this valuable sector.

Kosovo's forests are one of its most valuable natural resources. Although 41% of Kosovo is forested, forestry currently contributes only 2% to GDP. However, current legal harvests have reached only 20% of their potential. With well-managed, sustainable harvesting, Kosovo's forest resources could fuel significant economic growth and stimulate employment.

Fostering the economic development of Kosovo is a key priority for the US government, and through the Kosovo Private Enterprise Program, USAID has already realized some significant achievements in this area.

Since May 2006 the US government has been working toward forest certification in Kosovo through the Forest Stewardship Council. A milestone was reached in September of 2009 with the recognition of Kosovo's Standard Development Group (SDG) by the Forest Stewardship Council. Through recognition, this development group will set the standards for sustainable forest management in Kosovo, leading the way towards internationally recognized certification.

Forestry is a valuable resource for economic growth, yet without certification Kosovo will not gain access to lucrative markets that are within reach. In the EU and the US it is against the law to buy or sell illegally harvested timber or wood products manufactured from illegally harvested timber. In response, markets are increasingly requiring products to be certified.

Sadly, the greatest obstacle to forest certification in Kosovo is illegal logging. Because of illegal logging, much of Kosovo's high value timber is being sold for a fraction of its worth, because it is being sold to burn in someone's fireplace. Uncontrolled logging often results in clear-cutting. This dangerous practice leads to erosion in watersheds and compromises Kosovo's beautiful environment.

While economic growth can be the outcome of this forest certification process, good governance is the key to achieving it. Good governance is necessary to address illegal logging. Good governance will ensure efficient and profitable use of forests. Through good governance Kosovo's forests can contribute to economic growth and employment opportunities. Through good governance, Kosovo's beautiful natural environment can be conserved for future generations.

The key features of good governance include adherence to the rule of law, transparency, low levels of corruption, and stakeholder participation. Good forest governance is no different. It is characterized by a transparent forest policy process, a bureaucracy with a proud "esprit de corps", accountable governmental institutions, and a strong civil society participating in forest management decisions, much as you are doing today.

I've said many times before that Rule of Law and economic development go hand in hand. Investors, both domestic and foreign, will only invest where business is safe from corrupt practices, where contracts can be enforced, and where parties will be treated fairly and justly before the courts.

Neither Rule of Law nor a strong economy simply appear by magic -- they will require a contribution from the leaders of institutions, from citizens, from industry, from everyone in this room today.

These forum meetings provide an excellent way for you to become more involved as active citizens in advocating for more government oversight in the forestry sector. I encourage you to take the opportunity to review and comment on the forest certification standards which are available in Albanian, Serbian, and English.

The standards are not government regulations but are guidelines which we must collectively adhere to if we wish to succeed in this competitive industry. These standards, once approved by the Forest Stewardship Council --will signal to the global market that Kosovo's forests are managed sustainably for future generations.

The US Government is committed to working with our partners to address illegal logging, to obtain forest certification, and to gain access to valuable markets which will strengthen Kosovo's economic growth.

Good luck to you all, and thank you for your participation.